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Niklas Luhmann and Organization Studies

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Monograph

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David Seidl and Kai Helge Becker (eds.)

Niklas Luhmann and Organization Studies.
Copenhagen and Malmö: CBS Press and Liber
(December 2005)

Description of the book:

Niklas Luhmann was one of the foremost social thinkers of the twentieth century. His work is generally considered of equal rank and standard to those by such prominent social theorists as Bourdieu, Giddens, Habermas and Foucault. Drawing on very diverse strands of thinking within sociology and philosophy, and combining it with research in cybernetics, chaos theory and biology, Niklas Luhmann developed a unique way of theorising about the social, which has stimulated research in various academic fields such as media studies, political sciences, theology, philosophy, literature, pedagogics, sociology, and particularly also in organization studies.

Although Luhmann himself studied organizations in great detail, his works so far have received surprisingly little attention in the field of organization studies. This book tries to raise the awareness for this important perspective. For this purpose, the book provides a detailed, step-by-step introduction to Luhmann's theory of social systems in general and his organization theory in particular. Moreover, it contrasts Luhmann's mode of theorizing with other theoretical approaches in order to shed light on its strengths and particularities. Finally, the book demonstrates how this theory might be applied to different areas and questions of organization and management studies. In this way the potential of Luhmann's theory for providing new perspectives on issues of organization and management and for generating challenging new insights in these areas will be revealed.

Endorsements:

"Niklas Luhmann's work on autopoietic social systems offers a refreshingly new approach for theorising organization, decision-making and social interaction. Luhmann's crucial insight that paradox lies at the heart of organization and decision making provides the intellectual backdrop for this most welcome collection of essays carefully put together by Seidl and Becker. It is an excellent introduction to Luhmann's thinking and explores in a very accessible manner its wider implications for our understanding of organization, society and management practice." **Robert Chia, Professor of International Management, University of St Andrews**

"Important as it may be, Luhmann's theory of autopoietic systems is only in small parts available in English. Including four articles authored by Luhmann himself, the contributions in this book offer a much needed introduction to Luhmann's work, and explore its many implications for today's organization theory. A must read for an English speaking audience interested in one of the monuments of modern social theory." **Erhard Friedberg, Professor of Sociology at Sciences Po Paris, and Director of the Center for the Sociology of Organizations**

“Niklas Luhmann was one of the most important post-War sociologists whose work, at long last, has been finding its way into organization studies. Not the easiest of writers to follow, and with a very broad range of intellectual interests, Luhmann renewed systems perspectives to the study of society and enriched social theory with his insistence on the centrality of communication and the observer-dependent nature of reality. This book is not only a brilliant and reader-friendly exposition of Luhmann’s main ideas, especially focussing on autopoiesis and how it relates to social systems, but it also sets Luhmann’s work within the context of broader developments in organization theory, such as systems theory, institutionalism and postmodernism, and explores authoritatively its implications for how we understand organizations and management. We have long waited for a book like this. The editors deserve to be congratulated for bringing together such a brilliant collection of papers on a Luhmannian approach to organizations.” **Haridimos Tsoukas, The George D. Mavros Research Professor of Organization and Management, ALBA (Greece) and Professor of Organization Studies, University of Warwick (UK), Editor-in-Chief, *Organization Studies***

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